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A COURSE IN MODERN SOCIAL PROBLEMS FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL¹

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It is the purpose of this paper to reproduce some of the reactions of high-school pupils to an experimental course in Modern Social Problems which was organized and taught by the writer in the University High School, School of Education, University of Chicago, during the past year. The course, consisting of a study of a series of social problems, was open to Seniors only. There were no prerequisites, but the printed announcement recommended the other social-science courses as preparatory for this course.²

No textbook was available to cover the problems as planned. In view of this fact the writer used the topical library reference method, following an outline made in advance. Practically all of the well-known texts covering social, economic, and political problems, suitable for high-school Seniors, were secured for reference material. Mimeographed material, prepared by the teacher, was used in giving references and in providing supplementary reading materials not available to the class otherwise. The following is a brief outline of the course.³

¹ That there should be a course in modern social problems in the high school, the committees of the leading educational and social-science associations agree. For information on the extent of this movement for social-science courses in the schools, see the following: "Tentative Report of the Committee of the American Sociological Society on "The Teaching of Sociology in the Grade and High Schools of America," *School Review*, XXVIII (April, 1920), 255-62; C. O. Davis, "Training for Citizenship in the North Central Association Secondary Schools," *School Review*, XXVIII (April, 1920), 263-82; "Report of the Committee on Social Studies in the High School," *School Review*, XXVIII (April, 1920), 283-97; and L. C. Marshall, "The Relation of the Collegiate School of Business to the Secondary School System," *Journal of Political Economy*, XXVIII (February, 1920), 137-88.

² For a list and description of these courses, see H. C. Hill, "The Social Sciences in the University High School," *School Review*, XXVII (November, 1919), 680-94.

³ Dr. R. M. Tryon gave many helpful suggestions in planning the course.

GENERAL ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE IN MODERN PROBLEMS

- I. Society, Its Origin and Development.
What is society? origin and development; complexity of the social process; environment; the terms: community, group, institution; the wants of society; conflict of interests; co-operation; function; social heredity; social control.
- II. The Family, Its Past and Present.
An institution; aspects of the family today; structure; function; failures to function; forms of the family; historical development of family; divorce; desertion; causes; remedies and prevention; juvenile delinquency; mothers' pensions; family rehabilitation; the ideal marriage and the ideal home life.
- III. Labor and Industry: Making a Living.
Strikes; the conflict between capital and labor; analysis of factors involved; the origin and development of present conditions; making a living, man's primary task; the factors of production; industrial revolution; the nature of wealth and property; trusts, labor unions, and the public; the age of specialization; transportation; consumption; distribution; exchange; foreign commerce and the tariff; woman and child labor; the high cost of living; risks and wastes; insurance; socialism; social control of industries.
- IV. Social Control by Governments.
The functions of governments; origin of government; historical development; description of municipal government in Chicago; its organization and operation; nature of laws, courts, and taxes; problems of the Chicago municipal government; description of our federal government; its functions; origin and historical development; national problems; public finances; the work of the executive departments.
- V. The Health and Sanitation Movement.
The "flu" epidemic; its toll; methods of fighting; health and disease a problem through all history; health agencies among primitive peoples; historical development; advances in surgery; hospitals; growth of the sanitation movement; most common modern diseases; means of control of diseases; sanitation laws; pure-food laws; governmental health departments; personal hygiene; problems and lessons of the war; health and sanitation in Chicago.
- VI. Immigration and Assimilation.
Racial characteristics of our population; the melting pot; our immigrants, yesterday and today; industrial effect of immigration; social effects of immigration; Americanization, what is it, and how; the undesirable immigrant; shall we restrict immigration? the negro problem; race riots; the negro of the future.

VII. Social Pathology.

Dependent, defective, and delinquent classes; poverty and pauperism; prevalence in the United States; causes of poverty; an eternal problem; environment and pauperism; hereditary factors; charities; public and private forms of relief; dependent children; defective classes; the blind; the deaf and dumb; the feeble-minded; the insane; institutional methods of relief and education; crime, what is it? prevalence of physical and social treatment; penitentiaries; industrial schools; probation system; criminal courts; juvenile courts; socialization: home training, moral training, and education.

VIII. The Church as a Social Institution.

Moral training; the church and religion; variety of religious sects and denominations; the function of the church; man a religious being; history of man's attempt to satisfy his religious desire; origin and growth of present-day churches; an agency of socialization; of social control; criticisms of the church; auxiliary organizations; the opportunity and possibilities of the church today; the future and the church.

As originally planned, the content of the course included also the topics: "Education," "The Problem of the City," "Conservation of Natural Resources," and "Democracy and Internationalism." As the course proceeded, circumstances peculiar to the organization of this particular high school made it impractical to attempt to cover all of the topics contemplated.

The foregoing syllabus will give the reader an incorrect impression of the course unless he interprets it in the light of the following facts concerning methods of presentation and the reactions of the students themselves.

TECHNIQUE OF PRESENTATION

It was thought necessary that the pupil secure at the beginning, as far as possible, the group co-operative viewpoint. Two devices were utilized in accomplishing this: an appeal to the student's own experience with group life such as family, school, teams, clubs, etc., and the reading of a historical narrative of the origin and step-by-step development of a western community.

It is difficult for a pupil to view his own community in a more or less impersonal and objective manner, especially if it be a large city. In order to assist in the observation of the community, mimeographed sheets with suggestions for points to be observed

were provided, not as an assignment to secure a particular number of facts which, when arrayed in the proper form, could be exchanged for a school grade, but simply as a guide to the pupils' observation. The purpose here was to develop a viewpoint, not to secure a definite amount of work. Each group reported to the class on its observations of the community visited and in most cases presented a sketch map to the other students in describing the life of the community.

The following is the outline given to the pupils and discussed in the classroom previous to the visitations:

OBSERVATION OF THE LIFE OF A COMMUNITY

- I. Natural Conditions
 - 1. Explaining the location of the town
 - 2. Natural resources of region tributary to the town
 - 3. Other physical environmental factors
- II. The People
 - 1. Population
 - 2. Races, proportional representation
 - 3. Peculiarities of the composition of the population
- III. Institutions
 - 1. Educational
 - 2. Religious
 - 3. Others
- IV. Commerce and Trade
 - 1. Stores
 - 2. Transportation
 - 3. Factories and mines
 - 4. Others
- V. Groups
 - 1. Clubs
 - 2. Labor unions
 - 3. Lodges
 - 4. Others
- VI. Communication
 - 1. Internal
 - 2. External
- VII. Agencies of Social Control
 - 1. Town government
 - 2. Courts
 - 3. Institutions for delinquents
 - 4. Others

VIII. Narrative of the Origin and Development of Community

IX. Sketch Map of Community

1. Streets
2. Institutions
3. Transportation lines
4. Physical environmental characteristics
5. Others

In addition to the foregoing type of work, field trips were made during the school year by the class and teacher, by groups, or by individual students to the following places: Lyon & Healy's Piano Factory, Chicago Board of Trade, Chicago Stock Exchange, Cook County Courthouse, election polls, session of Chicago City Council, fire-department stations, water-pumping stations, Hull-House, and the State Penitentiary at Joliet. The pupils voluntarily gave their Saturday mornings and after-school hours for these trips. One of the most productive exercises of the year was the trip of each student with his parent to the election polls, and the experience meeting during the class period on the following day.

A number of formal debates during the year, on questions closely related to the work in hand, proved interesting and stimulating. Students also took their weekly turn in surveying the daily papers for articles and cartoons pertinent to the problem being studied. Cartoons are often particularly effective teaching devices. The clippings were posted on the classroom bulletin board. Other devices were special reports and open classroom discussions. Note-books were required.

THE STUDENTS' REACTIONS

Near the close of the year's work, the students were asked to answer the following questions:

1. There is a movement to require a course of this kind of all high-school students. Would you favor or oppose? Give reasons for your answer.
2. In which of the problems included in this course were you most interested? Indicate your preference by placing a (1) before your first preference, a (2) before your second preference, and so on.
3. Which of the most commonly used books do you consider best for use in this course? Rank with numerals as you did above. Give briefly your reasons for your first preference.

4. How does the time required for preparation in this course outside of the classroom compare with that required by other courses?
5. Are the field trips to institutions, etc., worth while? Give your reasons.
6. What do you consider the weak points of this course? the strong points?
7. How in your opinion may the course be improved?

Below are given the results so far as they can be summarized and reduced to tabulation.

1. On the matter of requiring a course in modern social problems of all high-school students, one was opposed and twenty-six were in favor. The following are seven typical comments made by those favoring:

I favor making it required, because it teaches pupils to think as much as mathematics or Latin. Not only does it teach one to think but also how to organize. Besides these things, it is of some use. It gives one a broader view of society in general.

I think this course is different from all the rest which makes it especially desirable. It is more practical as it is what we meet every day.

If people are taught these things when they are young they will be an influence, perhaps, on their own lives or they may be able to influence others. Thus it forms a basis for the future. If people are interested in this subject early they may become a help to society when they are older.

Makes the student realize the problems of society and the serious side of life. Problems like "Labor and Industry" and "Social Control by Government" would be of actual value to any individual in making a living or being a good citizen.

Favor. Many don't go to college and will never have a chance to study these problems.

I favor making it required. Right along we have been giving as remedies for our social difficulties "education," making people realize the importance, or the danger of so and so. Certainly there is no better way of carrying out a part of that than right here. An appreciation of our social problems is a great asset to one's usefulness in any capacity. One of the things of great value which I have gotten from this class is the fact that a great field of new material and thought has been opened for me. I probably will not remember all the facts that I have learned here, but I do know, and I shall not forget, where to get them.

I favor. It gives a grasp of many problems with which we daily come in contact. Besides acquainting us with present-day problems it gives us valuable training in (1) use of textbooks and research work to obtain material, (2) observation of essential topics of literature, (3) ability to think, (4) ability to cope with large questions (that are not limited in scope), and (5) presenting arguments effectively.

The opposer said:

I oppose. I believe that only mathematics and English should be required high-school subjects. While this course is useful and worth while, it is not essential enough that it should be required of the high-school student.

2. Table I summarizes the pupils' statements concerning the relative interest in the topics studied.

TABLE I
POPULARITY OF TOPICS AMONG PUPILS. PROPORTION OF PUPILS RANKING PARTICULAR TOPICS AS AMONG THE THREE MOST INTERESTING TOPICS STUDIED

TOPICS*	STUDENTS STUDY- ING TOPICS			RANKING OF TOPICS FIRST, SECOND, OR THIRD						RANKING IN POPULARITY				
	Girls		Boys	Both		Girls		Boys		Both		Girls	Boys	Both
	Number		Number	Number		Number		Number		Number				
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage				
Family	13	11	24	7	54.6	1	9.0	8	33.3	4	6	(4-5)		
Labor and indus- try	13	11	24	8	61.5	9	81.8	17	70.8	3	1	3		
Social control by government	14	13	27	1	7.1	6	46.1	7	26.0	6	4	6		
Health and sani- tation	14	13	27	5	35.7	4	30.7	9	33.3	5	5	(5-4)		
Immigration and assimilation	14	13	27	11	77.1	10	76.9	21	77.7	1	2	1		
Social pathology . .	14	13	27	10	71.4	9	69.3	19	73.7	2	3	2		

* The first and last topics in the course were not included in the ranking by the pupils. The former "Society, its Origin and Development," was of an introductory nature and the latter, "The Church as a Social Institution," was not entirely completed at the time of the questionnaire.

It is interesting to note from the table on popularity of topics that "Immigration and Assimilation" was the most popular topic, while "Social Pathology," which, as presented, was principally a study of crime and poverty, came next in interest to these high-school pupils. "Labor and Industry" ranked third in popularity. While it does not seem advisable to use space to present the detailed tabulation of all the rankings yet there are some significant facts to be pointed out. Variation in the pupils'

interests is indicated by the fact that each one of the six topics was ranked as being the most interesting of all by one or more pupils.

A comparison of the preferences of the boys and the girls shows that the boys considered "Labor and Industry" the most interesting of all, while the girls placed it third in ranking. Connected with the fact that the girls preferred "Immigration and Assimilation," the inference might be made that girls are more interested in *people* and population, and boys are more interested in the process of *making a living*.

Another comparison should be noted in the case of the topic, "Social Control by Government." No girl placed it first or second, and only one girl considered it of sufficient interest to rank it as third. At the same time 78 per cent of the girls as contrasted to 15 per cent of the boys considered "Government" one of the two least interesting topics.

The attitude of the boys as contrasted to that of the girls toward "The Family" as a topic for study is interesting. We have here almost the reverse of the situation in the case of "Government." No boy ranked the "Family" as his first or second preference, and only one boy considered it of sufficient interest to rank it third; over 36 per cent of the boys ranked it sixth, indicating that it was the least interesting of all to them. As a whole the boys ranked the "Family" last and "Government" fourth; on the other hand, the girls ranked "Government" last and the "Family" fourth.

3. The response to the question as to which of the various books on social science for secondary schools used during the year was best showed that Ellwood's *Sociology and Modern Problems*, Towne's *Social Problems*, and Burch and Patterson's *American Social Problems* were the most popular. While it does not seem advisable to give the complete data, that is, listing all the books and their rankings, the tabulation below will indicate the relative popularity of these three:

	Number of Pupils Ranking		
	First	Second	Third
Burch and Patterson.....	1	13	12
Towne.....	3	11	13
Ellwood.....	22	3	1

Twenty-two out of twenty-seven pupils said that Ellwood's *Sociology and Modern Social Problems* was the most desirable text for a course in modern social problems. A few quotations will indicate what the high-school student considers the prerequisites of a good textbook:

Ellwood: Very thorough and seems to have a better insight into the problems than other books. When I read Ellwood I feel that I am getting the main points and am not bothered with unimportant details.

Burch and Patterson: An outline is printed at the beginning of each topic, so that a brief summary might be seen at once, and a slight knowledge of the topic secured. Few statistics; and each paragraph has its outstanding point in heavy print.

Towne: Organization is especially good. In reviewing you can find the main points of the subject in a sentence or two. Covers the whole field and brings out the important points.

Ellwood: In my opinion the strongest feature in its favor is that it points out so well the underlying *principles* which govern the facts. In giving remedies or criticizing others the author always goes much further below the superficial aspects of a situation than the other writers.

Ellwood: More confidence in the author, more advanced material, style more scholarly, terminology more technical, clear organization, and an admirable lack of unimportant statistics.

Although no two of the books used cover exactly the same field, yet a survey of the comments made by students seems to indicate that they do not care for statistics and an array of facts when the author fails to interpret them fully. Students also seem to appreciate very definitely a good organization of the material. It is not to be expected that high-school students will interpret cold facts and statistics without much assistance from author or teacher.

4. The fourth question was: "How does time required for preparation in this course outside of the classroom compare with that required by your other courses?" A tabulation of the replies gives the following result: more time, 14; same amount of time, 11; less time, 2.

5. "Are the field trips to institutions, etc., worth while?" No, 3; yes, 24. The pupils seem convinced on this point and were

quite outspoken in their reasons. The following are some of the typical comments:

You can learn more by visiting a factory when you are studying "Labor and Industry" than by all the reading put together.

Some learn more this way than in class and understand the problems better.

Gives one a feeling in the subject, that is, it isn't like a mathematics problem.

Seeing is more impressive than reading.

It is easier to grasp the concrete than the abstract.

I sometimes learn more from a trip than from three or four days of study.

Because we can see the actual functioning of the institutions.

Makes you see the problems more clearly.

6. The pupils were asked to state what, in their opinions, were the weak and strong points of the course. These points cover both the content of the course and the method of presentation. The following is a summary of the most repeated comments:

STRONG POINTS	WEAK POINTS
Gives a realization and appreciation of social problems	Lack of satisfactory text material
Its practical value	Objections to certain problems
Particularly interesting	Need of more class discussion
Promotes better citizenship	Insufficient number of field trips
Training in thinking	Length of time given to particular topics
Training in organization	Too much written work

The point on which most agree is the lack of satisfactory text material for the course as a whole; certainly all teachers of such courses as this will agree. It is interesting to note that one boy thought that the absence of a textbook was a favorable feature of the course; two pupils mentioned training in how to use books as a favorable point. One objected to "too much theory" and others spoke of class discussions and trips to institutions as strong points. One of the most frequently repeated comments was the practical value of a course of this kind. One pupil was so outspoken on this point that she stated: "There is a tendency toward academic, impractical subjects in high schools, and there is a definite need for knowledge of pertinent subjects."

7. While this last question, from one viewpoint, was a repetition of the preceding one, yet it called for constructive suggestions for improving the course.

The following are the suggestions on which four or more pupils agreed: more field trips; securing of satisfactory text and collateral material; introduction of more daily current events; selection of a greater number of more concrete and less extensive problems; more class discussion.

CONCLUSIONS

1. If this group of pupils can be assumed to be typical, there can be no doubt as to the preference of high-school pupils concerning the desirability of introducing courses in social, economic, and political problems. Although it did not seem advisable to include the question in the foregoing questionnaire, yet, as an entirely separate exercise, the pupils were asked to compare the courses they were taking and, without giving their names or means of identification, to rank the subjects according to their value to them. While an effort was made to secure only sincere non-prejudiced answers, nevertheless the replies must be taken with reservations. The tabulation of rankings shows that of 27 pupils, 17 considered the course in "Modern Problems" the most valuable one being taken; nine ranked it second, and one ranked it third. Practically every high-school subject was represented in the rankings; a goodly number were taking mathematics, French, English, and physics.

2. It is to be hoped that when these new social-science courses are introduced formalistic methods of presentation will be avoided. The physical sciences without laboratory work and field trips would be of considerably less value. The same is true of the social sciences for the high-school pupils. It is true that the course as described requires preparation, time, and energy on the part of the teacher. It is recommended that, where practical, the time schedule provide for a "laboratory" or a field trip period for this and similar courses.

3. More material adapted to high-school pupils is needed. The content of the course should be of immediate interest and of practical value to the girls as well as to the boys. The material

must be something more than an array of facts and statistics; these facts must be given a living meaning, and the *principles* underlying them must be made evident.

4. A course of this kind requires considerable reading. The writer's experience leads him to believe that there is danger that too extensive note-taking will detract from the value and interest of the course. Discretion should be used and for some kinds of materials few or no notes should be required.

5. Because of the abstractness of social science, much open class discussion is necessary, as was so frequently and insistently expressed by the students in their comments. However, this should not lead to "mere forensic exchange of ignorant opinion." The teacher is responsible in this matter. If he is specially prepared for this work, he can and will guide the discussion along profitable lines. Adequate preparation is just as necessary for the social-science teacher as it is for the chemistry teacher. It is hoped that these new courses will not experience the fate of many history courses when first introduced, namely, that of being doled out to teachers of mathematics, Latin, English, agriculture, domestic science, and manual training.